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NSC FOR MGAVIN AND CHUDSON
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN

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SUBJECT: EXPAT FUR INTELLECTUAL URGES ROOM FOR CIVIL SOCIETY IN
DARFUR

11. (SBU) Summary: Darfuris can solve the crisis in their homeland if the international community presses the GOS to allow Darfuri civil society to operate there, according to Dr. El Tigani Sesei, one of Darfur's preeminent expatriate intellectuals. El Tigani characterized Abdul Wahid as "catastrophic," and Khalil Ibrahim is "finished;" he said that the international community should not rely on them to achieve peace. Instead, El Tigani advises a concerted civil society effort, saying, "The people of Darfur can frustrate the Sudanese strategy of dividing Darfur by conducting dialogue with the Arabs." El Tigani urged the U.S. to exert "tremendous pressure" on Sudan to force it to reverse its decision to expel major NGOs. El Tigani intends to return to Sudan, but did not offer a concrete date for his return. End summary.

12. (SBU) Deputy Director of the UN Economic Commission for Africa and senior advisor at the Partnership for African Development, El Tigani has lived in Addis Ababa since fleeing Sudan in 1990, where he was jailed while serving as the governor of North Darfur. El Tijani organized a large meeting of Darfuri civil society leaders in Addis Ababa in late 2008 and is recognized as one of the more vocal members of the Darfuri Diaspora. Currently in London engaging with the Sudanese community there, El Tigani met with poloff on February 27 in Addis Ababa, and has continued to offer his views on events in Darfur over the last turbulent month.

13. (SBU) Speaking with poloff by telephone after the GOS to expelled thirteen international NGOs from Sudan, El Tigani called this a further example of official "bullying," with Darfuri IDPs suffering, as a result, at the hands of the Government of Sudan (GOS). "I don't believe this move was based on the ICC - it was timed to it, but not related," he said. Disappointed that the UN Security Council was unable to agree on a unified position regarding the expulsions, he added of the GOS, "They consider this an opportunity to kick out the aid agencies knowing that China and Russia will support them in the Security Council." He advised the U.S. of the need for "tremendous pressure" to force the GOS to reverse the decision before the Darfur rainy season begins in the summer.

REGIONAL ACTORS UNHELPFUL, BASSOLE "FINISHED"

14. (SBU) El Tigani did not hide his disdain for regional Arab leaders, having returned to Addis from Libya at the end of February after witnessing Libyan President Moammar Qaddafi blame Israel for the destruction in Darfur. "Qaddafi entered the meeting only to tell us that Israel was to blame for the problems in Darfur. He looked right at me when he was speaking!" El Tigani dismissed the Qataris and the February talks in Doha as a useless exercise in deal-making between two parties bent on each other's destruction, consequently undermining the credibility of the Joint Chief Mediator. "Bassole is finished," he said unhesitatingly, adding that

JEM's participation in the talks also compromised the Islamist rebel group in the eyes of Darfuris. By negotiating with the NCP, El Tigani said, "JEM made a mistake at Doha, and Darfuris will not accept JEM. Even now all JEM soldiers are in Chad, and if the Chadian rebels take N'Djamena, JEM is finished." He also cautioned the international community from negotiating with armed actors, and urged that political legitimacy in Darfur should not be defined by the use of force. "It is a mistake to think that every rebel should be recognized," he reasoned.

ABDUL WAHID CATASTROPHIC, FUR TRIBE NEEDS TO ENGAGE ARABS

15. (SBU) Describing himself as one of the harshest critics of Fur rebel leader-in-exile Abdul Wahid el Nur, El Tigani called Abdul Wahid's presence at peace talks in Abuja "catastrophic." "I have been saying since 2006 that he is a waste of time. He is using the plight of the IDPs to advance his own agenda." El Tigani sees Abdul Wahid's recent public embrace of Israel as a mistake. He added that the latter seemed unaware that the implications of his actions would reverberate through an Arab world, which was unprepared for such a move. "He did what every other Sudanese opposition politician does in secret," El Tigani added. Questioning the power and influence of Abdul Wahid's faction of the Sudanese Liberation Army, he urged the international community not to engage with him seriously, claiming his movement is strongly anti-intellectual and unprepared for political negotiations.

16. (SBU) Instead of relying solely on Abdul Wahid and his failed movement, El Tigani instead is advising the Fur people in Darfur to engage directly with Darfuri Arabs. . "The people of Darfur can

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frustrate the Sudanese strategy of dividing Darfur by conducting dialogue with the Arabs," he said. Unity among the Fur and the Arab tribes in Darfur, he claimed, has long been a GOS "stumbling block" for what he called the "expansionist Islamist agenda" of the NCP in Africa, much as the Kobe Zaghawa of Chadian President Idris Deby has kept Khartoum's Islamists from connecting with their Arab brethren resident in West Africa. Yet as much as the NCP has marginalized the Fur tribe, El Tigani also remains concerned that Khartoum may act against the Arabs in Darfur in a similar fashion as it seeks to establish dominance in the restive region. "Since 1987, the National Islamist Front has tried to undermine the Arabs in Darfur, and soon they will use them again, as they consider that they are expendable." He believes Fur civil society can isolate the warring Arabs easily to reach the Arab tribes, who are as much at risk as the Fur themselves.

MORE ROOM NEEDED FOR DARFURI CIVIL SOCIETY

17. (SBU) El Tigani urged the international community, and the U.S. in particular, to reach out to Darfuri civil society for comprehensive solutions, a move which would require the U.S. to pressure the GOS to provide more room for non-violent actors to operate in Darfur. Saying the West has underestimated the power of those who scorn violent action, he boasted in complete seriousness, "I could start a battalion now if I want, and we would have funding, with enough men from my family coming to fight with me." In concert with other civil society leaders in 2008, El Tijani's plan is to gather Darfuri groups and tribes together to establish a set of common negotiation positions, then put the agenda to the rebels.

18. (SBU) Poloff asked El Tigani whether he intends to return to Darfur, and he unhesitatingly answered "yes." However, in numerous conversations, El Tigani has been unable to say exactly when. "Now the Darufri community is too polarized, but I promise I will return, because I cannot do my work from here in Addis." After traveling to London in late March, he will return to Ethiopia to resume his position with the UN Economic Commission for Africa. (Note: In a recent meeting in February with two young Fur leaders, Nasredeem Abdulbari and Ismail Abdullah, both junior professors at Khartoum universities, said they regard El Tigani's return as imperative for

the Fur community. "Dr. El Tigani is one of the best, very well-respected in Darfur and Sudan," said Abdulbari. "All Fur are talking about unity now. We would advise him to come back to Sudan." Recently, El Tigani has been in frequent contact with Abdulbari and Abdullah. End note.)

19. (SBU) Comment: The UN/AU Chief Mediator would gain much from consulting with Fur civil society leaders such as El Tigani, and ultimately any peace deal arrived at in Darfur would have more legitimacy if it included the input of El Tijani and his colleagues.

In most conflicts there is no substitute for a ceasefire between the government and the rebels. Darfur, though, is an unusual conflict in that some of the rebel groups have little legitimacy in the eyes of Darfuris, and the strongest rebel group (JEM) doesn't control any territory. SLA/AW controls swaths of Jebel Mara. It lately has been left untouched by the GOS because it does not threaten the government in a significant way, and has not attacked government installations in the recent past. Given the reality in Darfur, a political solution should include input from civil society leaders such as El Tijani as well as consultations among tribal leaders. As El Tijani suggests, direct discussions between unarmed Fur and Arab leaders would contribute dramatically to the peace process in Darfur, but could also unify the region against Khartoum.

For this reason, the NCP regime often tries to block such initiatives as its hold on Arab tribes is tenuous. End comment.

FERNANDEZ